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ABSTRACT

Through content analysis of interviews based on a class art activity, a study of 15 first-graders investigated children's perceptions of a good story. The story was based on children's interpretation of artwork they had created. Through the use of content analysis, three major themes of the children's stories were identified: (1) animals as main characters; (2) young children as main characters; and (3) problems or danger. Results of analysis indicated that story telling based on student artwork can facilitate literacy development. Contains 13 references. (JW)

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THE MAKINGS OF A GOOD STORY: CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS UNFOLD THROUGH THEIR ARTWORK

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THE MAKINGS OF A GOOD STORY: CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS UNFOLD THROUGH THEIR ARTWORK

Introduction

Young children have a difficult time expressing themselves verbally (Protherough, 1983; Smith, 1976). Art offers children an opportunity to create something with which they may identify (Carson, 1985). According to Goldberg (1992), artistic expression allows children to express what they know and what they understand in another medium. Britsch (1993) further stated that children use their drawings to tell a story.

In an effort to investigate multiple ways of knowing, Clyde (1994) entered a first grade classroom as a co-teacher instead of as a visitor. She found that, through artwork, one child was better able to express his thoughts and his knowledge on a particular subject. According to Clyde, "the more global nature of art provided a more compatible format for Douglas' ideas" (p. 28).

Through the incorporation of art and drawing into high school honors English classes, Claggett and Brown (1992) found that students were better able to make meaning as they read and as they wrote. They stated that students were able to move from the visual to the verbal by talking about their drawings. Drawing enabled them to discover, develop, and confirm their own ideas and perceptions.

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate children's perceptions of a good story through the interpretation of their artwork. By better understanding children's perceptions of a good story, ways to develop literacy may be found.

Procedure

Subjects

The subjects for this study consisted of 15 first grade children from Overstreet Elementary School in Starkville, Mississippi. There were eight males and seven females. Overstreet Elementary School houses all first and second graders attending public school in Starkville.

Traditionally, first grade has been the place and time to begin formal instruction in reading (Shuman, 1979). Durkin (1982) suggested that there was a period of time when reading instruction to any child less than six years old would not have received positive support. Because of this view, first graders were selected as the subjects for this study.

Method

Interviewing the children took on a different approach. It called for the researcher to enter the world of the children and to allow them to express themselves in a method with which they were most comfortable and familiar. The chosen method of articulation consisted of drawings by the children. According to Davis (1993), "meaning can be constructed and communicated

through the different symbol systems of . . . . visual art")p. 88). Art is an essential part of young children's lives (Throne, 1988) and "is the scaffolding for writing" (Bunce-Crim, 1991, p. 16).

The classroom activity consisted of the subjects composing a story through artwork. Instructions were given to all children in the classroom by the researcher. Each child had ample supplies to use. After the completion of the picture, each child dictated his/her story to either the classroom teacher, the teacher's aide, or the researcher. Each child looked at his/her picture while telling the story. The story was written on a separate sheet of paper. The entire class participated in the art activity with the artwork being taken from only the subjects for this study.

Analysis Of The Study

According to Merriam (1988), content analysis is a procedure used to describe the content and categories which emerge as a result of communications. Through the use of content analysis, three themes emerged as to children's perceptions of a good story. A major theme was determined to be important if at least one third of the children made a reference to that particular theme. Themes which surfaced from less than one third of the children were considered minor themes. The three major themes which emerged were: (a) animals as main characters, (b) young

children as main characters, and (c) stories that presented problems or danger.

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